



**SPEECH**  
*OF THE*  
**HON. G. W. ROSS**  
*AT THE*  
**BANQUET**  
*GIVEN TO THE*  
**HON. CLIFFORD SIFTON**  
*BY THE*  
**LIBERALS OF TORONTO**  
**DECEMBER 11th, 1900**  
**IN REPLY TO THE TOAST "THE LEGISLATURE  
OF ONTARIO."**

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# SPEECH

BY

## Hon. Geo. W. Ross

### AT THE SIFTON BANQUET.

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Hon Geo. W. Ross, Premier of Ontario, was given a magnificent ovation on rising to address the friends of Mr. Sifton. Mr. Ross said: I thank you very much for your cordial reception. In enthusiasm and volume it is all that I could desire—indeed, far more than I deserve. The Liberal Party in Ontario may have lost its majority, but certainly it has not lost its voice. I am glad to have the privilege of being present to do honor to Mr. Sifton. We all rejoice with him in the victory he achieved—a victory in which Sir Hibbert Tupper was vanquished if not annihilated, and in which Hugh John Macdonald, trusting to the prophecies of Sir Charles Tupper, risked his political life with consequences well known to them all. I need hardly say that I am not surprised at Mr. Sifton's success. Mr. Sifton is a Middlesex boy, and Middlesex boys are well known for their winning ways, and if my presence here to-night is any mark of esteem for Mr. Sifton, I am only settling a debt I owe his father for valuable services rendered me in my first campaign in 1872.

#### MR. SIFTON'S POSITION.

Mr. Sifton occupies a somewhat unique position in the Dominion Government. He is the only representative in the Cabinet of the greater Canada west of the lakes. He speaks for a district which is an empire in itself, and greater in area than any

European Empire excepting Russia; if it falls short in wealth or in progress of the rest of Canada, I am quite sure it will not be through any want of foresight or effort on Mr. Sifton's part.

But while we rejoice in Mr. Sifton's success, we cannot withhold some feeling of disappointment at the result of the General Election in the Province of Ontario—a Province of all others where we had a right to believe the Government would be supported by a handsome majority. Still, this is no time for vain regrets. Every cloud has its silver lining, and in this case it is most gratifying to know that the lining is larger than the cloud—the cloud extended over the Province of Ontario mainly, but the lining extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific. One grateful reflection we can indulge in with confidence, and that is, that Sir Wilfrid's Government is too high-minded and too just in administering the affairs of Canada to measure Provincial rights by majorities at the polls. Nevertheless, I think we must all admit that

### **ONTARIO WAS GRIEVOUSLY AT FAULT**

in the verdict which it rendered at the last election. If we look at the policy of the Government from a selfish standpoint, no other Province in the Dominion profited so largely as Ontario from the comprehensive measures adopted by the Dominion Government for the development of Canada. The extension of the Intercolonial Railway to Montreal did more for transportation in Ontario than it did for any other Province, as it connected directly all our railway systems with our great ocean ports. The reduction in the tariff resulting from the preference given to Great Britain saved us more in custom dues than was saved to any other Province, because we imported and consumed more British goods. The reduction in the postal rates was proportionately advantageous, because of the use our larger population necessarily made both of local and international mail service. And, without reflecting on the other Provinces, because of our larger manufacturing industries, we were the larger gainers from the stimulus which the policy of the Government gave both to manufactures and to agriculture.

### **POLICY OF GOVERNMENT.**

As a matter of sentiment, too, the policy of the Government appealed most strongly to the people of this Province. Ontario was the centre of the British Empire League. In loyalty to the Empire, we were on all occasions most exuberant; we welcomed

preferential trade with Great Britain with an enthusiasm not exceeded in any Colony of the Empire, and Conservatives vied with Liberals in applauding Sir Wilfrid Laurier for his splendid services in promoting the unity of the Empire.

### **WE EXPECTED TO WIN.**

All this and much more that will no doubt occur to many of you, warranted us in believing that our majority at the polls would be decisive. Then why were we defeated? What was the fated Nemesis that ruined our hopes, decimated our ranks and left us with a paltry 36 seats out of 92, where we should have practically swept the country? With a party pledged to adjust the tariff and that pledge fulfilled skilfully and satisfactorily; with a Party pledged to promote the industries of the country and that pledge fulfilled so that not a single industry has been injured in the slightest degree; with a Party pledged to abolish deficits, and a surplus of seven millions to its credit, how was it that in this intelligent Province its great merits were overshadowed, its administrative ability overlooked and some of its oldest and most experienced representatives in Parliament rejected by their former constituents? Are you waiting for my answer? I shall give it as I understand the situation. It was because the Conservative Party

### **MADE AN INSIDIOUS APPEAL**

to the racial and religious prejudices of the electors, suggesting among other things that the success of the Government meant the supremacy of Quebec in the councils of the nation. I say their appeal was insidious; I mean by that, that it was not presented openly; it was not made from the platform, for if so made, it could have been answered; it was made in the dark; it was made by the Conservative candidate in private; it was made to the elector at his fireside and alone; it was done as the incendiary does his work, and it had the same destructive effect as the work of the incendiary usually has. That it was so successful is beyond my comprehension. No other man in Canadian politics to-day has proclaimed more boldly or more persistently the essential unity of race and creed in national affairs than Sir Wilfrid Laurier—and rightly so. Canada cannot afford a war of races; there is no French Canada as distinct from an English Canada; Canada is one nation; it is British and must only be known as British Canada, and is known only as such by every true Canadian.

### **FRENCH DOMINATION.**

But is there any foundation for the cry of French domination that like a pestilential miasma pervaded the air and so insidiously poisoned the minds of the electors? I cannot say that it is a new cry; perhaps as a Liberal I am bound to confess that I heard it in my early days even used by my own Party—I believe unfairly then, but under entirely different circumstances. Before Confederation, when Upper and Lower Canada were pitted against each other in the old Parliament of Canada, we did feel now and again that Lower Canada was not as considerate with respect to the public opinion of Upper Canada as it might have been; but under Confederation the conditions were changed. With a Provincial Government of our own, local matters were withdrawn from the federal arena and all cause of complaint accordingly removed. The British North America Act gave us our proportionate share of Parliamentary control and we were content, as we ought to be. French domination could not therefore be, and never was since Confederation, a Liberal cry.

### **AN UNGRATEFUL CRY.**

But why should such a cry be raised by the Conservative Party? From 1867 down to 1896, except for one term, the Conservatives were supported by a majority from the Province of Quebec and that a majority of French origin. While that majority was with them, there was no cry of French domination; no person appeared to dread the supremacy of Quebec in the government of the country. When that majority turned against them, with an ingratitude and a baseness almost incredible, the loyalty of Quebec was impugned and the prejudices of the people were appealed to because the Leader of the Liberal Party was a French Roman Catholic—as if in former days the Conservatives had not followed a Cartier and a Chapleau, a Langevin and a Caron. Am I wrong in assuming therefore that the cry was dishonest, ungrateful and unworthy of the Party that used it purely for the purpose of gaining a political advantage? Or shall I put it even on higher grounds, that it was unworthy of any man or any Party that had any regard for the unity of Canada or the stability of Parliamentary government?

### **ARE FRENCH DISLOYAL?**

Is there any ground for the charge that the French-Canadians are disloyal? Let us consult the history of Canada if we

desire an honest answer. And first let me refer to the war of 1812. It was well known that the Americans in 1812, built their hopes of conquering Canada very largely on the expectations of securing the assistance and co-operation of the French-Canadians and it needs no argument to show that, had the expectations been well founded, the result of that invasion might have been very different. How did the Parliament of Lower Canada regard the invaders? Did they receive them with open arms as one would have expected a Parliament composed almost entirely of French-Canadians would have done had they been so deeply tainted with disloyalty as it is alleged they are to-day? Let me answer this question in the words of D. B. Read, Q.C., a well-known Conservative of Upper Canada, as given in his history of the Canadian Rebellion of 1837:

"The Session before the actual declaration of war by the United States was opened by the Governor, Sir George Prevost, on the 21st February, 1812. The Parliament at once set about preparing for the defence of the Province. Twelve thousand pounds were granted for drilling the local militia, twenty thousand pounds for incidental measures of defence, while a further sum of thirty thousand pounds was placed at the Governor's disposal should war be declared between Great Britain and the United States. Taking into account the fact that the total revenue of the Province was seventy-five thousand pounds, charged with the expenses of the civil list of fifty-nine thousand pounds, the war defence fund was a splendid contribution by the Province of Lower Canada. More than this, when it became known at Quebec on the 24th June, 1812, that Congress had actually declared war, a Provincial Statute was at once passed to legalize the issue of army bills, to the amount of two hundred and fifty thousand pounds in order to replenish the public exchequer, and an annual grant of fifteen thousand pounds made for five years, to pay whatever interest might accrue. On the 6th July, 1812, the whole militia of the Province had been directed to hold themselves in readiness to be embodied, while the flank companies of the Montreal militia were formed into a battalion and armed."

Had Quebec been settled by an English-speaking population, it could have done no more than was done in this instance to provide for the defence of British supremacy. So conclusively does this action of Lower Canada determine the question that it



is quite unnecessary to add to the resolute action of the Parliament the further assurance of French loyalty given by the brilliant and successful attack made by Colonel de Salaberry at Chateauguay.

#### **ACTION OF FRENCH IN 1837.**

It may be said that in 1837, under Louis Papineau, many of the French-Canadians resented the indifference of the Colonial Office even to the extent of armed resistance against constituted authority. It must be remembered, however, that many English-speaking people in Ontario were similarly influenced by the denunciations of William Lyon Mackenzie and that the stigma of disloyalty, if stigma it is, was not confined to one race. There were Englishmen in Lower Canada as well as in Upper Canada who resented the interference of Downing Street in the government of the two provinces. Just as in 1849 there were Englishmen as well as Frenchmen, some of whom were afterwards demonstrative in their loyalty, who signed a manifesto favouring annexation with the United States.

#### **THE FRENCH AND CONFEDERATION.**

But, if the French-Canadians were conspicuous for loyalty to British institutions in the early history of the country, they were not less conspicuous in later years in their desire to extend Britain's influence to the whole extent of her North American possessions. Of all the remarkable epochs in the consolidation of British power in this Continent, none is more noteworthy than the Confederation by which we are now known as the Dominion of Canada. I need not tell you that among the most active promoters of this confederation were to be found the leaders of public opinion in the Province of Quebec. If we pause to consider what confederation meant for the French-Canadians we cannot fail to recognize their unselfishness in accepting it as a new basis of government. In the old Parliament of Canada, Lower Canada had equal representation with the English-speaking Province of Upper Canada and in the long and fierce contests between opposing parties which waged for twenty years before Confederation, Lower Canada uniformly held the balance of power. Confronted by a federation of the British Provinces the French of Lower Canada might very well argue that, if the federal compact were entered into, they would, comparatively speaking, be in a helpless minority, as out of a total representation of about 200, which it was proposed the four Provinces should have in the federal parliament, the Province of Quebec

should for all time to come be limited to 65. A narrow-minded French-Canadian, whose racial antipathies were fundamentally anti-British, it might be expected, would oppose confederation no matter how important it might be to the interests of the Empire on this ground: Why should he place himself in the hands of a hated British majority? To do so would be to imperil his language and his creed. Indeed, as a matter of fact, this view was presented in the old Parliament of Canada during the debate on the resolutions which ultimately became the basis of confederation.

### HOW FRENCH MEMBERS VOTED IN 1865.

In the debate on the Speech from the Throne in 1865, in which the Governor-General recommended the favorable consideration of certain resolutions agreed to by representatives of the different provinces at Quebec in the previous year, the Hon. Mr. Dorion moved the following amendment:

"That this House deems it a duty respectfully to express to your Excellency its firm conviction that the people of this Province, fully appreciating the blessing of their existing political relations with the great Empire of which they form a part, neither seek nor wish to create a new nationality."

Of the forty French members who voted on that resolution, only 18 voted for Mr. Dorion. The full French representation of Quebec in the Legislature was 51 French and 14 English members. Of these latter 7 voted for Mr. Dorion. It is, therefore, plain that, at the inception of Confederation when 4 out of the 5 British Provinces were openly committing themselves to the formation of a new nationality in which the English-speaking element would be vastly in the ascendancy, the majority of the French-Canadians were broad enough and British enough to support the proposed federation, the express object of which was to strengthen and perpetuate British supremacy ultimately over half of the American Continent. Had the French-Canadians been exercised by a craven fear of race or language, or had they from a spirit of disloyalty been disposed to resist Confederation, do you think it would have been accomplished? Compare their course with the action of Nova Scotia, almost entirely English, and where do they stand? Is it not perfectly clear, therefore, that in this first and supreme movement by which Canada has become heir to half a continent, the French-Canadians were not less loyal than their English-speaking brethren to the Federation of Canada.

### **PURCHASE OF NORTH-WEST.**

The next step towards the expansion of the Dominion was taken at the first Session of the Parliament of Canada held in 1867-8, and consisted of a proposal to take measures for the acquisition of the North-West Territories. Here again, if the racial idea dominated the French-Canadian, as it is alleged it now does, one would expect not only the most resolute opposition to such a measure but a solid vote against it. What had the French-Canadian to gain from the acquisition of such a territory? He could not expect it to be peopled by emigrants of his own race, nor by any large number of the people of his own Province. If acquired and settled, it would still more reduce the relative influence of his Province in the councils of the Dominion and add to the cost of administration for which he would be bound to pay his share. The measure was, however, adopted after two divisions, in the first of which the vote stood 104 to 41; of the 41 only 13 were French-Canadians; and in the second division by 121 to 15, 10 of the 15 being French-Canadians. The great majority of the French-Canadians in both cases voted for the acquisition of the North-West Territories, adding practically an empire to the boundaries of the Dominion.

### **ADMISSION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.**

In 1871 it was proposed to extend the Dominion of Canada to the Pacific ocean by the admission of British Columbia. Looking at the matter from a French-Canadian standpoint, one would expect the same objection to be raised in this case as might have been raised against the acquisition of the North-West Territories. The division, however, on the admission of British Columbia showed that the French-Canadian had no quarrel with the idea of expansion westward, as out of 67 members who voted against the admission of British Columbia, only 15 were French-Canadians.

Now, I think I have proved sufficiently the proposition with which I started that in every great movement for the expansion of Canada, and for increasing its strength and prominence as a material part of the British Empire, the French-Canadians played a most loyal and generous part, and that by no act, savoring of racial or religious prejudice, did they impede the territorial growth of the Dominion of Canada. What more could they have done had they been of the same blood as ourselves?

### BETTER TERMS WITH NOVA SCOTIA.

Let me now speak briefly of a few other measures closely identified with the prosperity of Canada. And first let me mention the measures adopted in 1869 for the pacification of Nova Scotia, known as "Better Terms." I need not say here that, had the course of the Government of the day towards Nova Scotia been more politic, the necessity for the so-called "Better Terms" might never have arisen. Still the Government had to deal with a Province that had reached the verge of rebellion and some measures of conciliation were necessary if pacification was to be effected. Against the measures proposed by the Government for this purpose 57 members of the House voted. Of these only ten were French-Canadians, thus showing when Confederation was imperilled the French-Canadian was willing to go even further to promote peace and harmony than his English-speaking brethren.

### THE NATIONAL POLICY.

Again in 1879 when the resolutions with regard to the National Policy, were before Parliament—resolutions designed to preserve to Canada her own market—of the 53 members of the Legislature who voted in the negative only 10 were French-Canadian. Now do not let me be understood as admitting the French-Canadians were right in this instance (for I voted against these resolutions myself) as I believe now that a revenue tariff is better than the protective tariff for which the French-Canadian voted. But I mention this circumstance to show that it was a great turning-point in the industrial history of Canada. The French-Canadians, alleged to be so disloyal now, sustained the policy of the Conservative Party as the only true Canadian policy and therefore the only loyal policy to adopt, while the Liberals, who refused to accept the National Policy, which meant the exclusion of the products of the United States, were charged with disloyalty.

### PACIFIC RAILWAY.

Similarly, when the Pacific Railway agreement was before Parliament in the Session of 1881 and when its construction was urged on the ground that it would furnish a highway for Imperial troops across the Continent, if need be, and at the same time bind all the Provinces together as they could be bound in no other way, the French-Canadians received the scheme with

special favor, only nine of them voting against it while 36 voted in its favor. From a Conservative standpoint the Pacific Railway was essential to the success of the Dominion. If the French-Canadian is disloyal how can that charge be reconciled with the endorsement of the construction of this great railway?

### **UNRESTRICTED RECIPROCITY.**

A majority of the French-Canadians also voted against Unrestricted Reciprocity with the United States. Everyone remembers how the old flag was hoisted during the General Election of 1891 and what a strong appeal was made to the people of Canada to vote against the Liberal Party because of its alleged intention to divert Canadian trade from Great Britain to the United States. Against this alleged intention, 28 French-Canadians voted, disloyal though they now are. What a change must have come over them in a few years! In 1892, and still more recently, in 1899, a majority of French-Canadians voted in favor of preferential trade with Great Britain, than which no stronger testimony of loyalty to the Empire need be required. And, when a vote of want of confidence was moved in Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Government because it sanctioned the sending of a contingent to South Africa, only 10 of the 50 French Canadians then sitting in Parliament voted against the Government. Here, as in other instances, the weight of the French vote was decidedly British. Indeed I do not think it should be assumed that the vote given against sending a contingent to South Africa was at all a vote against the maintenance of British supremacy in the Transvaal but rather a protest against the action of the Government without the authority of Parliament.

### **RACIAL PREJUDICE.**

But it may be argued that although the French-Canadians are loyal to Britain, their racial and religious prejudices dominate all political movements. This charge has, in my opinion, little or no foundation in fact. For instance, in the elections which took place on the 7th of November, 14 constituencies of Quebec, where the French population is from 3 to 20 times greater than the English-speaking population, elected an English member and in several of the constituencies the English-speaking member did not represent the religion of the majority.

### THE NEST OF TRAITORS.

I have reserved, however, as the crowning evidence of French-Canadian loyalty, as the piece de resistance of my argument, the action of the French-Canadian section of the Conservative Government in the revolt against the Conservative leader in 1895. You all have heard of the "Nest of Traitors," in which the leader pathetically declared he lived. Who were these traitors? Will you not be surprised when I tell you that in that noble band of seven traitors or bolters, or whatever you choose to call them, there was not a single French-Canadian. Foster was there and Montague was there and the late Mr. Ives, an English-speaking representative from Quebec and four others, but not one of that race so little to be trusted, so bigoted and so dangerous and wayward in its allegiance to its lawfully constituted leader.

### NOTHING TO FEAR.

But why should I dwell further on a topic which history has settled so conclusively. As I said at the outset, the racial cry raised at the last election was a baseless cry and basely used for Party purposes. Had it secured for the Conservative Party a majority in Parliament, even if that majority consisted entirely of French-Canadians, we would have heard no more of it. To reproach a whole race with disloyalty because it exercises its franchise according to its convictions is not the best way to promote Canadian unity. Judged by the record I have given, the people of Ontario have nothing to fear in the French-Canadians of the sister Province. Then what is

### OUR DUTY IN THE PREMISES ?

We have accepted Confederation as the best means of promoting our own interests and of strengthening the bonds which bind us to the Empire. We are less than six millions of people, of which a million and a half are of French origin. Our Parliament is composed of 200 members, in which usually fifty French-Canadians hold a seat. In population and in the councils of the nation we are as near as may be, numerically, four to one. We boast of our education, our toleration, and our generosity. Shall we now be guilty of discrediting one-fourth of our entire population for the sake of Party advantage, or reflecting on a race that endured hardships and sacrificed much for the sake of the institutions whose advantages we equally share? Or, worse still, shall we

### IMPERIL THE FUTURE

of the Dominion by fostering racial and religious animosities and by appealing to prejudices, which can have but one effect, to postpone if not destroy that feeling of national unity essential to the solidarity of the Dominion? In Mr. Gladstone's great speech, on the introduction of his Bill for the "Disestablishment of the Irish Church," among other reasons given for the measure one was "to cement with the bond of human sympathy the noble fabric of the British Empire." Is it not plainly the duty of the people of Ontario (for I believe they are the chief offenders in this case) to reconsider their attitude toward the sister Province, and, instead of sowing the land with dragons' teeth as was done in the last election, to adopt Gladstone's policy with respect to the Irish Church and endeavor to cement with the bond of brotherly sympathy the noble fabric of this Dominion? What Canada now wants, above all things, is that her public men should preach

### THE GOSPEL OF NATIONAL UNITY.

It is easy, in a Confederation composed of provinces so remote from each other, to arouse jealousies which would make the government of Canada by one central Parliament almost impossible. It would be equally easy, by intemperate appeals to passion and to prejudice, so to antagonize Provinces contiguous to each other as to delay, if not defeat, the good of the whole country. The demagogue and the factionist look only to the advantages of the present moment. The true patriot has his eye upon the future. The demagogue for immediate success would sacrifice the future to his own ambition. No true Canadian can afford to be either a demagogue or a factionist. The gospel of unity is the animating spirit of national consolidation. In no other century of the world's existence has this gospel been promulgated with greater success. Under its inspiration the scattered provinces of Germany have been consolidated into one of the first Powers of Europe. Australia is entering upon a new era of prosperity, as the first Commonwealth within the British Empire. Great Britain is marshalling her colonial forces as never before, and the United States has consolidated seventy-six millions of people into a Republic that speaks with but one voice in the councils of the nations.



### NATIONAL SOLIDARITY.

Has the time not come when similar sentiments should prevail throughout our vast Dominion? Has the time not come when no man should point to another whose religious opinions are different from his own and say: "You are not entitled to the confidence of your fellow-men although you may claim the confidence of the Almighty." The great work of nation building is the peculiar privilege of the Liberal Party. It is to the Liberal Party we owe Confederation and the late Hon. George Brown was its apostle. Others may take credit for perfecting the work he began, but no one can deny him the honor of being the pioneer. And although the Liberal Party since Confederation has had the honor but for a short time of showing its wisdom in directing our Dominion towards the goal of nationhood, no one will have the temerity to say that under its present leadership it has failed "in taking occasion by the hand" and in giving a powerful impulse to its prosperity as well as to its aspirations. A few short years ago and our entire commerce was but 131 millions of dollars, now it is 380 millions of dollars. A few short years ago we were dissevered and isolated Provinces, now our heritage extends to three oceans. A few years ago we were regarded by British Statesmen as

### A MENACE TO THE PEACE

of the Empire, as a discontented outpost whose separation from the Empire no one would regret. To-day we are regarded as an elder brother, or rather as a firstborn and the rightful heir to Imperial honor and affection. And although it may have taken us years to have reached this position, although many hands and hearts have contributed to our prosperity, I think I may say without excess of adulation that one of the greatest contributors to our national prestige and pre-eminence has been the present leader of the Liberal Party, Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

### THE FUTURE OF CANADA.

It is said that when the Declaration of Independence was drawn up and submitted to the members of the Convention that approved of it for their individual signatures, some hesitated in taking a step which would undoubtedly identify their acts should they ultimately fail in gaining their independence. Benjamin Franklin remonstrated against such hesitation, declaring



that his fellow-members should all sign, "for," said he, "we must hang together or we shall hang separate." Stirred by this appeal the various members came forward for some time with promptness. There was a lull in the proceedings for a moment. Then it is said an aged man, his grey hair streaming over his shoulders, advanced deliberately towards the table on which the historic document was spread, and taking up the pen used for the purpose sat down and wrote the name "John Hancock" in characters large enough, as Wendell Phillips said in one of his great speeches, to be seen by George III. across the Atlantic. So we may say that in the spirit of statesmanship, and with a hand as steady as that of John Hancock, Sir Wilfrid Laurier has written on the page of history the name of Canada in characters large enough to be seen by all the nations of Europe across the Atlantic. What punishment is sufficient for him who would dim one letter of that name or in any sense obscure its lustre or discredit its significance as the symbol of good government, religious toleration and national unity!

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